

The Athenian Mercury:

Saturday, June 27. 1691.

A Gentleman having lately sent us several Questions, and been withal so kind to give us his own Thoughts upon them, for which we own our selves extremely oblig'd to him, as being (as willing to Learn our selves as to Teach others; we shall here according to his Desire insert the said Questions, and give our Opinions both of them and his Judgment upon them, with the same Philosophical Liberty we would allow others in relation to our own Works—The

1 Question is—**W**Hether Sin might be Ordain'd to God's Honour and Man's Happiness?

Answer. By Ordain'd, I find the Querist means—Man's being so necessarily determin'd to the Condition thereof, that 'twas impossible for him to avoid it. This he also holds in the Affirmative, and endeavours to establish his Sentiments by this Argument—That it might be Ordain'd for God's Honour he pretends to prove, because all his Attributes are manifested thereby—his Wisdom, Power, Justice, Holiness, Mercy and Love; and that it might be Ordain'd for Man's Happiness, because without it he had never Dy'd, and consequently had never been glorified—We take the Negative of the Question, as we believe every one must who will have just or honourable Thoughts of God. To the first Branch of the Argument, for the Affirmative, That the Ordaining Sin conduced to the manifestation of all God's Attributes; we say, that supposing any such thing, any such irresistible Ordination or Necessitation of Sin, the quite contrary follows to what is asserted. Thus in God's Wisdom, all know and grant that true Wisdom consists in choosing right and just means to attain a good End. Now nothing is plainer than that Sin is a bad means to attain any thing, though the best of Ends, and such means as God won't permit his Creature to make use of, who must not do evil that good may come of it, though their Perfection consists in Imitation of their Maker—therefore the Ordaining Sin, or the absolutely Necessitating, or being a proper efficient Cause thereof, which would make God guilty and his Creatures innocent, would by no means conduce to the manifestation of his Wisdom, but the quite contrary. The same supposition as highly contradicts his Justice—Justice in respect of Punishment always supposes a subject capable of Rewards and Punishments; and further supposes a Law by which it must judge and distribute them. But farewell both Law and Justice, Punishments and Rewards, if we make Sin absolutely Decreed, effectually Ordain'd, Necessitated, Produced by God in his Creatures, and afterwards Eternally Punished—For, 'tis one of the first and clearest Notions implanted in our Natures, and deny'd by no Man, that absolute Necessity excuses any thing. Further, Where is the Mercy of God, to save a few, (some will persuade us a very few) and punish all the rest of the World, for what they can't avoid, nay, what he has forc'd 'em to Commit? Where's his Holiness, and how does he hate Sin, if he himself Causes, Necessitates, Ordains it? To the second Branch of the Argument—That it might be Ordain'd for Man's Happiness, because without it he had never Dy'd, and consequently never been glorified—(in Heaven we suppose he means) it's as palpably false as the former, if taken all together. That he had never dy'd without sin, we readily grant, (in that sense that he dy'd for it) but that 'tis a fair consequence that if he had not dy'd he had not been glorified, we utterly deny, because he might have been translated to Glory, as Enoch was, without any proper Pain or Death—But then some will Object, if God Ordain'd not Sin, how came it into the World, for without his leave it could not? We Answer, By his Permission, a much more Modest Word. But then why did he permit it? Not only because he was not Obliged to hinder it, but because he was indeed Obliged not to hinder it; because the Nature of a Man requir'd this Permission or Liberty, who without this could never have been a free Agent, nor therefore a subject capable of Punishments or

Rewards. He permitted it also for all these Reasons for which the Querist pretends he Ordain'd it, namely, for the manifestation of his own Justice, Wisdom, Mercy and Holiness, which can't be injur'd by such his Permission, which had no real Influence on a free Agent, but yet considering him as fallen, might be and were abundantly glorified both by his raising him again when repenting, and punishing him when finally impenitent.—The two Corollaries the Author of these Queries draws from his, as he thinks, invincible Arguments, are—That if Sin might be Ordain'd, it was so—which he afterwards endeavours to prove, and that if thus Ordain'd and Necessitated, there can be no such thing as Hell-fire or Eternal Torments. The consequence of the first we deny, being only a posse ad esse; but turn it strongly upon him—a non posse ad non esse, it cou'd not have been Ordain'd to God's Glory, therefore it was not. The latter strikes home, and both he and Mr. Hobbs, and we doubt most of the Necessity-men know too well the consequence—that if Necessity of Sin, there cou'd be no Eternal Punishments for it; but the antecedent we do, and even shall deny, and hope we have given some satisfactory Reasons for our so doing.

Quest. 2. Whether Sin were not Ordain'd, or all Possibility of Adam's standing taken from him?

Answer. The Querist holds the Question, as those before, in the Affirmative, and endeavours to prove it from Eph. 3. 9, 10, 11. Who Created all things by Jesus Christ, —To the Intent that now unto Principalities and Powers in heavenly places might be made known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord; in whom we have boldness and confidence by the Faith of him. Hence he argues—God created all things, and therefore Adam to the setting forth his manifold Wisdom to the Powers above, which was too solid a Concern to be left to Adam's standing to frustrate— from hence and from our Saviours Death he concludes there lay an absolute Necessity on Adam to Fall, that Sin might enter, that Christ might be Crucified, that God might make his manifold Wisdom known in Christ crucified for Sin. Thus we have fairly represented the strength of the Argument, the contrary whereunto we with all sober Christians take upon us to defend: In Order whereunto we shall first Observe, that the very Foundation of the Querist's Reasoning here is false and fallacious: In the Text he gives us a part of a former Verse without the Context whereon it depends, and represents it as depending on the following Verses whereon it has no dependance, or at least no immediate one—Thus then he quotes it—[Who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent that now, &c. might be made known by the Church the manifold Wisdom of God:] which piece of Cunning makes the Words bear a Face much more favourable to his Design, though even taking them in that sense they would fail of doing him that service he expects from them, as we may anon prove. To find the true meaning of the Words, let's view the Context, where we find the Apostle discoursing of a Mystery, the Mystery of Christ, in other Ages not known to the Sons of men as now reveal'd unto the Prophets; which Mystery was—that Calling of the Gentiles, that they should be in his own words, Fellow-heirs, and of the same Body, and partakers of the Promises, as he wrote before, namely, Chap. 1.—That he might gather together in one all things: And Chap. 2. v. 11.—You being in time past Gentiles—& 14. He hath made both one. And indeed so great a Secret or Mystery was this Calling of the Gentiles, that the Christian Jews could hardly persuade themselves to believe it after 'twas Confirm'd in the Case of Cornelius, by a Vision from Heaven, and speak of it as a very marvellous thing, when convinc'd of its Truth—Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted Repentance unto Life! Now of this Mystery or Dispensation, the Apostle says he was made a Minister, the Gospel of the Uncircumcision being committed unto him—and according to the Office of a Minister was to preach among the Gentiles the un-

searchable

searchable Riches of Christ; and to make all Men see what is the Fellowship, the Communication, or as the words will well bear, the Dispensation of this Mystery; namely, the Calling of the Gentiles, the Mystery he all along before spoke of, which from the beginning of the World had been hid in God: The same with that in the 5th Verse, which in other Ages was not made known. Who Created all things by Jesus Christ: there add a Colon, as in all Copies, Greek, Latin and English. Then follows V. 10. To the intent that now unto the Principalities and Powers, &c. might be known by the Church the manifold Wisdom of God. Here we say those words to the intent, relate not to those immediately going before—Who Created all things by Jesus Christ; but to those preceeding them—To make all Men see what is the Mystery which from the beginning of the World, &c. The sense being thus—God gave me Grace, says the Apostle, to Preach to the Gentiles—and to make all Men see what was the Dispensation of the Mystery which from the beginning of the World had not been before so clearly revealed—That Men knowing it, Angels also might by looking into the Church, which they desire to do, come to know and admire it, and therein the manifold Wisdom of God. It's plain this is the Sense and Dependence, from comparing as we have done the whole Context, and by remarking the Opposition between this Verse and that before—which from the beginning of the World had been hid—that Now might be known. And in this sense the best Commentators also Interpret it. Grotius, Hammond, if we mistake not Mr. Mede, and several others.

Having thus set right the Querist in this Text, we will notwithstanding grant him that the Fall of Man was Order'd though not Ordain'd, to manifest the Wisdom of God; though not that only. We add, that 'twas foreseen by God, that 'twas permitted by him, and that this Permission will answer all the ends for which it's pretended he Ordain'd it; though such ordaining or Necessitating it, would, as has been already Observ'd and Prov'd, absolutely destroying all those Ends. It could not be impossible for man to have remained in the State of Innocence, nor did God's Decree force him to Sin, for this would, as has been hinted in the former Question, take away all Sin, all Law, all Punishment, nay, God himself, or worse than take him away, since 'twould make him the most Cruel, most Unjust of Beings, causing Evil, then Punishing those who irresistibly commit it, than which, as one says sharply, Say worse of the Devil if you can! It takes away all Sin, and so makes the very supposition it self of God's Ordaining Sin ridiculous and impossible—since where there is no Law, there is no Transgression, but Necessitas tollit Legem, as before. Necessity, the highest absolute Necessity destroys all Law, because it makes its Subject incapable thereof, consequently it takes away the Justice of any Punishment, Temporal as well as Eternal—for all grant he who causes any ill is much more Culpable and deserving of Punishment than he who involuntarily commits it. 'Tis a vain and weak Answer, that he who Ordains the Sin Ordains the Punishment, since this widens rather than lessens the Difficulty. 'Tis as vain to say we are not to judge of God's Sovereignty and Justice, since we have at least as much right to do it as our Antagonists, especially when, as we hope we have prov'd, our Sentiments are for his Honour, theirs to his Dishonour. 'Tis as false as 'tis vain, for God appeals to that Reason he has planted in us as to the Justice of his own Actions—Are not my ways equal? Judge between me, &c. and a thousand other places—which he would never have done, had we not been in some measure capable Judges. Shou'd we, as the Querist wou'd perswade us, set aside Eternal Punishments, he wou'd in this Controversie be never the better, since any Punishment at all wou'd be Unjust for a thing impossible to be avoided—But a Punishment was both Denounced and Executed on Adam for his falling, and that a just Punishment surely, since God inflicted it, therefore such his Fall must needs have been avoidable. One Argument more we'll bring to confute this worst of Opinions, and then conclude this something Prolix Discourse, though such an Argument as we foresee won't at all please the Querist; and 'tis this: If Sin were necessary, there cou'd be no Eternal Punishments for it in the other World; but 'tis demonstrable that there are such Punishments, therefore Sin was not necessary. The first Proposition the Querist we are sure won't deny, nor the sequel therein, for we find that very consequence is the

drift of all his Dispute, as we doubt of most, and are sure of some others who are, or pretend to be of his Opinion. For the Minor, give us but the Infallibility of the Scriptures, and we'll undertake to demonstrate it against all the World: Demonstrate we say, not only that such Eternal Punishments are denounc'd in the Scripture, but also, with due deference to some excellent Persons, that 'tis thence Necessary, if God be true, that they shou'd be actually Eternal: Our particular Arguments for which we shall suspend, 'till we hear what the Proposer of the former Queries has to urge against it, after he has first Answer'd all we have here advanc'd, and clear'd his Foundation from those Contradictions and Absurdities wherewith we have so justly charg'd it.

Quest. 3. Whether Elijah [or Elias] mentioned in the last Chapter of Malachy, be any other Prophet than what hath already been in the World?

Ans. The Gentleman who proposes the Question holds it in the Affirmative: His Judgment is, that Elias here Prophesied of is yet to come. The Reasons he brings to favour his Opinion, are taken from the Text in the 4th. of Mal. 3, and 6. I send Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and terrible Day of the Lord: And, He shall turn the Hearts of the Fathers to the Children, &c. least I come and smite the Earth with a Curse. Hence he argues—If this mutual Love Elijah is to work is to continue to the end of the World, then he is not yet come; and accordingly interprets—the great and terrible Day of the Lord here spoken of, by the Day of Judgment and final Consummation of all things. And indeed it was the Opinion also of Tertullian, and perhaps of most of the Ancient Christians as well as 'tis of the Jews and Papists at present and of some learned Protestants also, that Elias shall come before the general day of Judgment. On the whole we first Remark, that supposing true, that Elias were then to come, as Mr. Mede, and others are of Opinion, it does not hence follow that he is not come already, for he may come twice, in which supposition we can discover no manner of Incongruity. That he is once already come, and that John Baptist was he, and the same who was Prophesied of in Malachy, we are more than once assur'd by the infallible Oracles of Truth it self: He was the Messenger that was to prepare the way of the Lord, Mat. 3. 3. He was to go before the Lord in the Spirit and Power of Elias (with his Zeal and Fervour, and manner of Life) to turn the Hearts of the Fathers to the Children, and to make ready a People prepared, &c. 1 St. Luk. 17. Our Saviour speaks in such a manner, that the Disciples understood he meant John the Baptist when he spoke of Elias; and well they might, for he tells 'em so positively, 11 St. Mat. 12, 14. From the days of John the Baptist, &c. This is Elias which was for to come: Agn 17, 12. Elias is come already. For that Argument brought to prove he is not yet come, because the Love he was to produce was to continue to the End of the World, a little before which it's thence concluded he was to appear in it, it is grounded on a false Supposition, namely, that by the great and terrible Day of the Lord must be meant the general Day of Judgment; whereas that Phrase is not seldom taken for the particular Judgment of Jerusalem, a Type indeed of that at the great Day; thus Acts the 2d. and in several other places, (though perhaps not so many as some great men have thought:) For the Earth here mention'd, all who are any way vers'd in the Old Testament know it signifies no more than Land, that particular Land of Judea, whenever 'tis found without any thing else affix'd thereto. Now the Inhabitants of this Land the Baptist did in great numbers restore, by Preaching to them Repentance, and thereby prepare the way of the Lord; and had sav'd the Country from utter Destruction and that Curse which afterwards fell upon them for refusing and Crucifying the Messiah, whom he Preacht unto them, had they generally Believ'd his Doctrine.

Advertisements.

Pray forbear sending any more Questions, till we give further Orders for it, we having many already upon our Hands, which will speedily be Answer'd, and then publick Notice shall be given thereof to the World.

We intended to have added here (according to our Promise in our last Mercury) a full Account of our ATHENIAN PROJECT, but we are prevented, and therefore must defer it 'till next Tuesday.